

# **ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S GETTYSBURG ADDRESS**

**AN EVALUATION**

*by*

**Dr. LOUIS A. WARREN**

*Director*

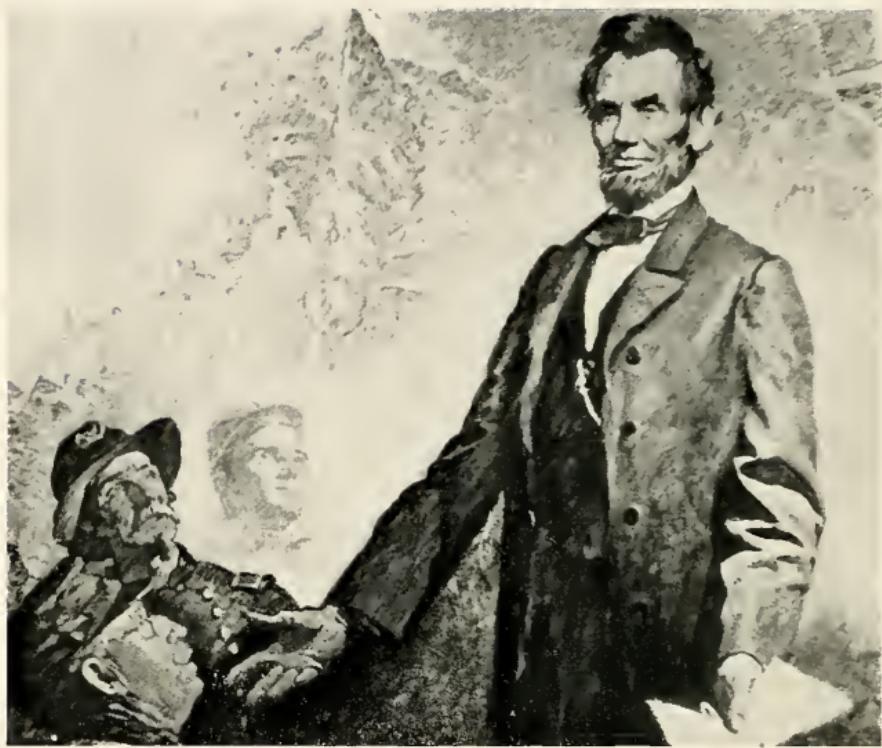
*The Lincoln National Life Foundation*







**ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S  
GETTYSBURG ADDRESS**



### LINCOLN AT GETTYSBURG

*From a sketch made by the artist M. Leone Bracker  
for the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company*

*"The Outstanding Classic of the Ages"*

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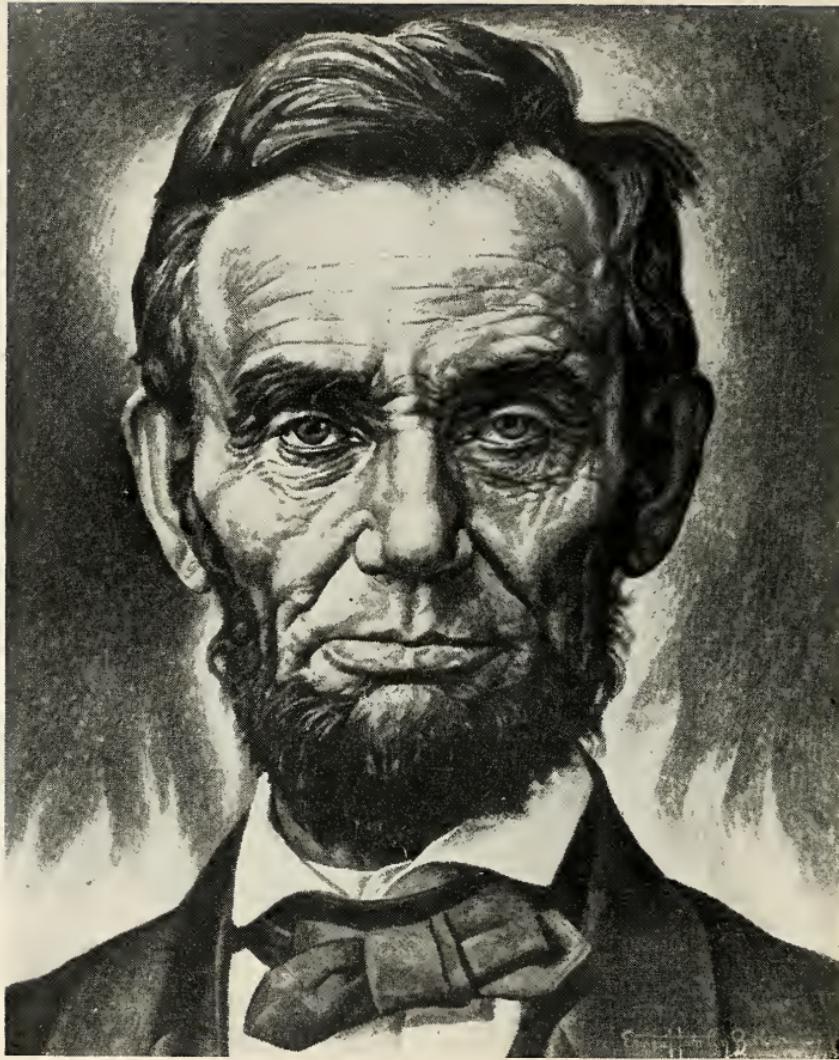
*Director, The Lincoln National Life Foundation*

*"Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, dedicating every loyal American to the service of our country for all time to come, is recognized by world authorities as one of the greatest patriotic documents of the ages." — Report, Committee on the Judiciary, the House of Representatives, the Senate of the United States.*

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### PRESIDENT LINCOLN

The artist, Ernest Hamlin Baker, drew this portrait of President Lincoln from a photograph taken by Alexander Gardner in Washington on November 15, 1863—the Sunday before the dedication of the national cemetery at Gettysburg. It is considered the best portrait of the President as he appeared at the time of the great Address.

## Lincoln's Eloquence at Gettysburg

**A**BRAHAM LINCOLN wrote a copy of the Gettysburg Address in longhand for Edward Everett. That copy has been purchased for \$60,000 contributed by the school children of Illinois. This valuable manuscript, displayed in the library of the Illinois State Historical Society at Springfield, ought to encourage a new emphasis on this noblest expression of eloquence in the English language.

Lincoln's great oration should become more than either a memory assignment for pupils in the elementary grades or a practice piece for students in public speaking classes. It should become more than a collection of epigrams from which to select timely phrases for the embellishment of patriotic posters. It should become more than an inscription cast in cold bronze to decorate a vacant place on the wall of a public building.

There is loftiness of thought and majesty of phrase in the Gettysburg Address. The words are vibrant with a great and enduring theme which should be a perpetual source of inspiration to Americans. The passing of time can never destroy the essential elements in a masterpiece. Lincoln's appeal for a "new birth of freedom" is as timely for today's Americans as it was for that group of patriots who met at Gettysburg on November 19, 1863.

Humiliating, indeed, is the fact that our English cousins have been more deeply moved by the beauty and appropriateness of the Gettysburg oration than the literary critics of our own country. Lord Curzon, a former Chancellor of the University of Oxford, delivered an address in 1913 on Modern Parliamentary Eloquence. He called attention to what he thought to be the three masterpieces of English oratory. They were the toast of William Pitt after the victory of Trafalgar and two of Lincoln's speeches. The Lincoln masterpieces were the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural Address.



**The Gettysburg Speech Monument**

Lord Curzon went on to say that he must give first place to the Gettysburg Address. There is an implication that it was the most eloquent oration ever spoken in the English language.

### **Tradition and Folklore**

Here in America, we have been busy building up two human interest stories about the speech, to the neglect of the speech itself. Many tales have been told about the way the speech was written and about the way the people of 1863 received it. These bits of folklore have kept us from an appreciation of the composition and of the far-reaching meaning of the Address.

Since most versions, as usually told, are untrue, they should be examined with care by all Americans.

**The Speech Was Well Prepared** One story, generally believed, tells us that the Address was prepared on the very day before it was delivered. It is said

that the speech was written on a railroad train on the way from Washington to Gettysburg. Further details of the story are that the speech was written on an old piece of wrapping paper, that the paper was picked up from the floor of the train, and that Lincoln scribbled with the stub of a pencil furnished by a young man in the party.

Another tale has it that the Address was not composed until Lincoln reached the home of his Gettysburg host, Colonel David Wills.

What conclusions have we drawn from these stories? We assume that Mr. Lincoln gave no thought to what he would say until the very last minute. We tend to think that the Gettysburg Address was a hastily, carelessly, and even slovenly written document. We have come to consider it a last moment effort with little thought or care given to its preparation.



#### PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S SPECIAL CAR

There seems good authority for the belief that this is a picture of the special car on which President Lincoln traveled to Gettysburg. If not, his car was like this one. The picture was taken when the car was old and no longer "spick and span" as it undoubtedly was

November 19, 1863.



Thinking Through the Great Problems Weighing Upon Him

Careful research shows that the facts are quite different.

The Library of Congress has another draft of the Gettysburg Address. When we read this copy, we can easily see that it was written before the copy taken to Gettysburg was prepared.

One of Mr. Lincoln's associates, several days before the dedication date, was told by the President that he had been working on the speech.

At least three distinguished men are reported to have read the manuscript at Washington before Lincoln departed for the ceremonies.

There is, then, evidence to prove that Mr. Lincoln devoted time and care to the preparation of his part of the exercises at Gettysburg. The Gettysburg speech was not set down on the spur of the moment.

There is, however, another way to approach this question. It makes little difference just when Mr. Lincoln chose to put into writing the ideas upon which he had deter-

mined. We know from his secretary, John Nicolay, how Mr. Lincoln usually went about the preparation of an important paper. Nicolay says, "He probably followed his usual habit in such matters, using great deliberation in arranging his thoughts, and molding his phrases mentally, waiting to reduce them to writing until they had taken satisfactory form."

Regardless of when the Gettysburg Address was actually written on paper, we can be sure that it was carefully and thoughtfully prepared many days before its delivery. Most certainly it is not a casual haphazard effort. It is not a last moment afterthought that might be called an extemporaneous speech.

**Was the Speech Appreciated in 1863?** Another generally accepted story has done injury to a proper appreciation of the Address. It is said that the speech was considered a failure at the time it was delivered. We are told that most people who heard or read the speech did not think it was great, or even excellent.

If this were true, we might say that we, the people, over many years, through recitation and generous praise, have made the oration popular. We have become the sponsors of its renown. Is it possible that we have built up a mediocre speech into one that is considered a masterpiece?

Mr. Lincoln himself may have felt that the Address did not measure up to what he had hoped. Some politically hostile newspapers were critical, giving the impression that the speech was a failure.

The President was, however, not kept in suspense very long. Edward Everett, a former president of Harvard University, had been selected to give the principal address at the dedicatory exercises. Possibly he was America's outstanding orator at that time. In a long oration at Gettysburg, he demonstrated his well-recognized ability as a public speaker. The few remarks of the President came

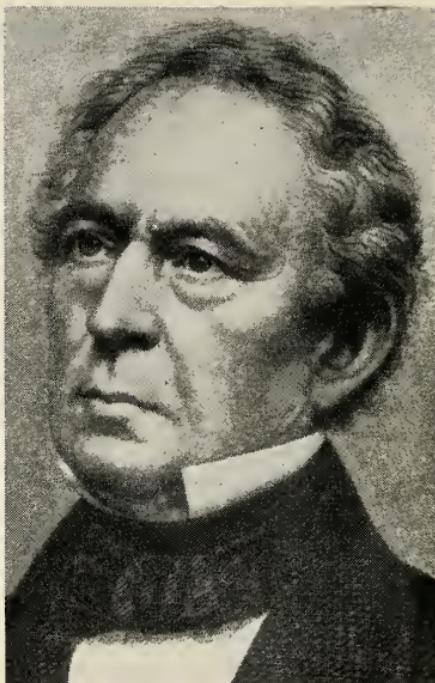
later in the program.

After Mr. Everett had started for his home in Boston, he wrote a letter to Mr. Lincoln. He thanked him for some courtesies extended at the ceremonies. Then he concluded his note with these words:

"Permit me also to express my great admiration of the thoughts expressed by you, with such eloquent simplicity and appropriateness, at the consecration of the cemetery. I should be glad if I could flatter myself that I came as near the central idea of the occasion in two hours as you did in two minutes."

Editorials about the President's speech appeared in many newspapers, and a number of them spoke of it in the highest terms. Some years ago, newspapermen were asked to pick out the outstanding editorial column in the history of American newspapers. First place went to the *Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican*. Josiah G. Holland was the brilliant writer for this paper when Abraham Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address. On the next morning, we find this comment on the editorial page:

"Surpassingly fine as Mr. Everett's oration was in the Gettysburg consecration, the rhetorical honors of the occasion were won by President Lincoln. His little speech is a perfect gem, deep in feeling, compact in thought and



EDWARD EVERETT

Distinguished statesman, perhaps the most noted orator of the period, who spoke almost two hours just before President Lincoln gave his immortal Address of less than two minutes.

expression, and tasteful and elegant in every word and comma."

The Governor of Massachusetts appointed a Commission to attend the dedication of the Cemetery. It contained men of some literary ability who reported the proceedings in writing. They said:

"Perhaps nothing in the whole proceeding made so deep an impression on the vast audience, or has conveyed to the country in so concise a form the lesson of the hour, as the remarks of the President. Their simplicity and force make them worthy of a prominence among the utterances from high places."

The facts refute the traditions that many of us have taken for granted about the Gettysburg Address. It was not the result of last minute preparation. It was not generally thought to have been a failure.

## Abraham Lincoln's Preparation

With tradition and folklore discarded, we must face an interesting question. How could a boy, born in a log cabin, brought up in the wilderness, and matured on the prairies, prepare and recite an oration which is recognized as the outstanding piece of eloquence in the language?

**Lincoln's Literary Style** To trace the beginnings of Lincoln's oratorical ability, we must go back to a one-room cabin in the wilderness. There a child listened with wonder to the stories which his mother read from the "Great Book." In later years, this boy, grown to manhood, said, "My mother was a ready reader and read the Bible to me habitually." The "beautiful simplicities" of the Bible were very early appreciated by this impressionable son of Nancy Hanks Lincoln.

One man who heard Lincoln give his classic political address at Cooper Union, in New York City, February 27,



©

In the Wilderness Cabin

1860, enthusiastically wrote, "I have just heard the greatest man who has lived since the days of St. Paul."

There was something in the peculiar way in which Lincoln expressed himself that reminded the listener of the Bible. The Second Inaugural Address, which one English newspaper said was the most eloquent state paper of the nineteenth century, is an illustration of Lincoln's use of Holy Writ. There are thirteen direct references to Deity in the brief document. Several scriptural passages and pious sentiments are in the writing. That address is often called "Lincoln's Sermon on the Mount," not only because of its biblical terms, but also for its generous and forgiving spirit.

All critics of Lincoln's literary style say that his simple but impressive diction can be traced to the Bible.

**Lincoln's Oratorical Power** The creation of a Gettysburg Address requires more than choice language. We must thank Lincoln's stepmother, Sarah Bush Lincoln, for providing another necessary part of his equipment.

When Abraham was but ten years old, the new Mrs. Lincoln first came to the Indiana cabin. She brought from Kentucky some books acquired at her former home in Elizabethtown where there was a flourishing academy. One of the books which Thomas Lincoln's book-hungry boy must have welcomed was Scott's *Lessons in Elocution*.

This book had one section with the fundamental rules for public speaking. It also had three hundred pages of "Prose and Verse for the Improvement of Youth in Reading and Speaking." Without doubt, it was from this book that Abraham Lincoln first read selections from Shakespeare, including many of the best known soliloquies. Here he found the famous speeches of Cicero, Romulus, Scipio, Hannibal, and other great orators. He found many selections from the world's best literature.

This book led Lincoln to study the problem of making speeches. Here he gained the urge which later led him to go into law and politics. In both, he had rare opportunities to develop the ability to express himself in public.

Two of the children who grew up in that Indiana home with Abraham Lincoln have told us about those early years. The budding orator, almost daily, used the other children of the home as an audience on which to practice his newly learned pieces of prose and poetry. Later, the boys on the neighboring farms furnished the inspiration for speeches. These boys left their plows to gather in some fence corner to hear "Abe" tell about the political ideas of Henry Clay or to discuss the issues of the day.

They could not have known how deep a furrow they were helping Tom Lincoln's boy to plow in the field of enduring eloquence.

**Lincoln's Patriotic Fervor** Proper diction was encouraged early by Lincoln's mother. Correctness of expression was encouraged by his stepmother. But there was another basic contribution that was essential to Lincoln's progress as an orator.

He needed some noble sentiment which would challenge his allegiance. It must demand his best energies, stir his very being. It must finally fan his patriotism into a fervid passion for the great mission of this new Republic.

Lincoln found this inspiration when he developed a determination to help perpetuate the "freedom for mankind" so dearly won by the founding fathers. Once, in talking of his early years, Lincoln told about the origin of this spark of democratic idealism. On his way to be inaugurated President of the United States in 1861, Lincoln was invited to address the State Legislature at Trenton, New Jersey. He began his speech in this way:

"Away back in my childhood, the earliest day of my being able to read, I got hold of a small book—Weems' *Life of Washington*."

Lincoln then told how deeply he was impressed by Weems' account of the "struggles for the liberties of the country." He especially recalled the stirring events which occurred at Trenton. What effect did this account have on the young man?

"I recollect thinking then, boy even though I was, that there must have been something more than common that these men struggled for. I am exceedingly anxious that that thing—that something even more than national independence; that something that held out a great promise to all the people of the world to all time to come—shall be perpetuated . . ."

It is not easy to imagine a boy of less than twelve years able to grasp thoughts of world-wide freedom. But freedom was a vital idea for Lincoln. He did not confine it narrowly to his own country. His mind extended to the needs of all

mankind. America must, by example, invite other nations to turn to democracy. This fond hope was ever before him.

**Lincoln Grows as an Orator** When Lincoln became of age, he was an accomplished public speaker. Those who heard him in those early years have testified to this fact. His use of language was couched in Biblical lore. His speaking powers showed the effects of his self-taught course in elocution. His soul yearned to help perpetuate American ideas of freedom.

When but twenty-three years old, Lincoln became a candidate for Representative in the Illinois State Legislature. He did this even though he had lived in the state but two years and in his community only six months. From that day on, he was almost constantly appearing before groups as a speaker. He was either a candidate for office, an officeholder, or a lawyer practicing in the courts.

By the time he was thirty years old, he was the chief spokesman for the Whig Party of Illinois. Later he had one session as a member of Congress. In 1856 came the famous debates with Douglas. These appearances gave him great prestige, and he was invited to give a political address in New York. In the Cooper Union, he was introduced by William Cullen Bryant to a highly intelligent group of citizens. He is said to have given the most eloquent interpretation of our political institutions ever presented in that city.

This climax of Lincoln's oratory at Cooper Union paved the way for his nomination to the presidency. The speech was carefully prepared. The manuscript embodied the experience of a whole lifetime of speechmaking on important political issues.

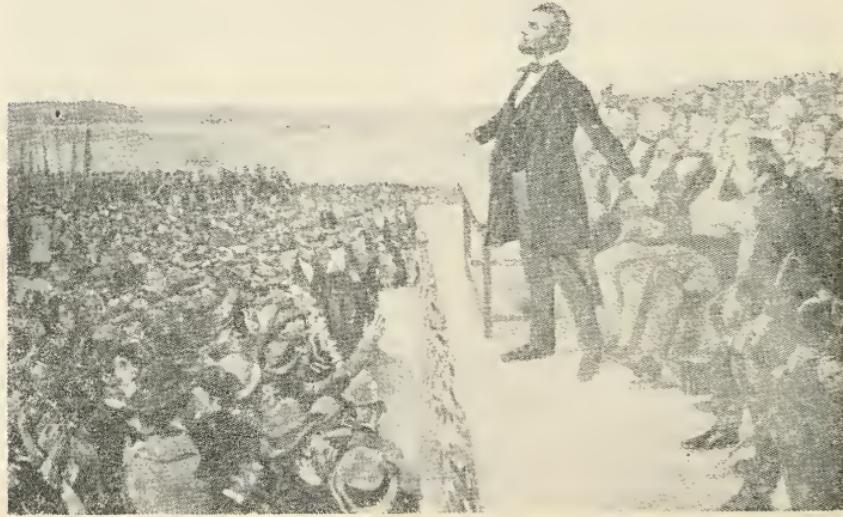
Lincoln's oratory is the result of this long experience. There were declamations at log cabin schools, stump speeches during political campaigns, and discussions in the Illinois Legislature. Then there were pointed talks in Con-

gress, pleadings before courts of justice, the series of debates with Judge Douglas, and many informal speeches as President-elect. As President, Lincoln gave his inaugural addresses and prepared outstanding messages to Congress. These all served to bring the eloquence of Abraham Lincoln to perfection.

It might be expected that this eloquent man would some day choose a theme which would bring out all his best powers.

**The Inspiration of the Place** One other factor—the inspiration of the place—must have contributed to Lincoln's masterpiece at Gettysburg. Lincoln was affected by places. Upon visiting Independence Hall in Philadelphia,

(Continued on page 18)



—From sketch in office of Gettysburg National Park Commission

**AN ARTIST'S CONCEPTION OF THE GETTYSBURG SCENE**  
No photograph was taken of President Lincoln speaking at Gettysburg. A photographer planned to take one, but it took him too long to adjust the cumbersome apparatus of the day. One photograph taken of the crowd is no longer usable.

# *The Gettysburg Address*

FOUR SCORE AND SEVEN YEARS AGO OUR FATHERS BROUGHT FORTH ON THIS CONTINENT A NEW NATION, CONCEIVED IN LIBERTY AND DEDICATED TO THE PROPOSITION THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL.

NOW WE ARE ENGAGED IN A GREAT CIVIL WAR, TESTING WHETHER THAT NATION, OR ANY NATION SO CONCEIVED AND SO DEDICATED, CAN LONG ENDURE. WE ARE MET ON A GREAT BATTLEFIELD OF THAT WAR. WE HAVE COME TO DEDICATE A PORTION OF THAT FIELD AS A FINAL RESTING PLACE FOR THOSE WHO HERE GAVE THEIR LIVES THAT THAT NATION MIGHT LIVE. IT IS ALTOGETHER FITTING AND PROPER THAT WE SHOULD DO THIS.

BUT, IN A LARGER SENSE, WE CAN NOT DEDICATE—WE CAN NOT CONSECRATE—WE CAN NOT HALLOW—THIS GROUND. THE BRAVE MEN, LIVING AND DEAD, WHO STRUGGLED HERE HAVE CONSECRATED IT, FAR ABOVE OUR POOR POWER TO ADD OR DETRACT. THE WORLD WILL LITTLE NOTE, NOR LONG REMEMBER WHAT WE SAY HERE, BUT IT CAN NEVER FORGET WHAT THEY DID HERE. IT IS FOR US THE LIVING, RATHER, TO BE DEDICATED HERE TO THE UNFINISHED WORK WHICH THEY WHO FOUGHT HERE HAVE THUS FAR SO NOBLY ADVANCED. IT IS RATHER FOR US TO BE HERE DEDICATED TO THE GREAT TASK REMAINING BEFORE US—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

# THE FIFTH AND FINAL AUTOGRAPH MADE BY PRES

*Address delivered at the dedication of the Cemetery at Gettysburg.*

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave themselves that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

*But, in a larger sense, we can not dedi*

Five autograph copies of the Gettysburg Address made by President Lincoln's final judgment as

# COPY OF THE GETTYSBURG ADDRESS DRAFT LINCOLN

cast — we can not consecrate — we can not hallow — this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here; but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain — that this nation under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Abraham Lincoln

November 19, 1863.

Lincoln are in existence. This one was first reproduced in the volume "Baltimore Soldiers' and Sailors' Fair, April, 1864. It represents President Lincoln's content of the Address.

he exclaimed, "I am filled with deep emotion at finding myself standing in this place."

At Gettysburg, he stood on the very ground where one of the world's greatest battles had been fought. There thousands of men had given "the last full measure of devotion."

We may have forgotten the enormous loss of life in that relatively short battle. Recently, a reporter was speaking about a tragedy in World War II. A German attack had made a great "bulge" in the line. There were 53,000 Allied casualties. The reporter compared these losses to those at Gettysburg. That number of men were killed and wounded at Gettysburg in three days, while the fighting in the Battle of the Bulge lasted a month.

Lincoln felt keenly the loss of life on that piece of "hallowed ground." There was another conviction which bore heavily upon him. It was the feeling that the War Between the States should have ended there. Many military authorities agree with this conclusion.

Coming at the zenith of a lifetime of preparation, and delivered at a place which provided unusual inspiration for a man of Lincoln's character, it is not surprising that the address became his supreme oratorical achievement.

**Lincoln and Pericles** Only one other great oration has been compared favorably with that of Lincoln at Gettysburg. That is the funeral oration by the immortal Pericles at Athens.

There are many striking similarities in these two speeches. Both were delivered where brave men had fallen in battle. In Greece, Athenians had fought against Spartans, North against South, Greek against Greek. In America, the ground was where Puritan grappled with Cavalier, North faced the South, and American met American.

Both Lincoln and Pericles began their orations with direct references to the contributions of the "fathers."

Pericles began, "I will begin then with our ancestors, our fathers inherited, etc." Lincoln opened with, "Four score and seven years ago, our fathers, etc." It is significant that both orators, separated in time by centuries, should begin by commemorating the works of the fathers.

## The Gettysburg Address

*"Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."*

**The Theme** Over and over again we have quoted these words which open the Gettysburg Address. Their pleasing and poetic diction have made us overlook the fact that they state the subject of the speech.

The Address contains a specific theme, and Mr. Lincoln introduced it in a way that makes us think of the nativity episode—"And Mary brought forth her first born son." Placing particular stress on the birth of the United States, Lincoln exclaimed, "Our fathers brought forth" a new nation. It was the nativity theme which Lincoln chose to develop. The subject of the address might well be "The New Birth of Freedom."

The nativity year of the nation is announced in impressive language. But Lincoln senses the importance of events that went before the birth of the nation. The country was "conceived in liberty." Even the christening, or dedication, of the new-born nation is not overlooked. The Union was "dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." In a few sentences we gather the story of the origin of our Republic and its meaning.

*"Now we are engaged in a great Civil War, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war."*

**Perpetuity** The preservation of the life of our own nation was not the only objective of the war. A broken union would have made men think that no nation, conceived in freedom and dedicated to an equal chance for all men could endure. Lincoln called attention to the importance of the war in determining whether or not the United States could survive. But he also was sure that the war was more than a local contest between those who would save and those who would divide the infant republic. The future of every man, in all countries, would somehow depend on the outcome of the struggle.

*"We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this."*

**Recognition** Mr. Lincoln here leaves his concern about the future of the United States and of the world, and comes to the practical purpose of the occasion. He moves on, however, without departing from the theme he has selected. Those who had died at Gettysburg had died for a great cause. The ability of the nation to live thus far was due to the sacrifices of men on this and on other battlefields.

"That this nation might live," these men had given without limit. They were to rest, as they had fought, side by side in their honored graves. It was indeed "fitting and proper" that these men should be revered and kept in memory.

*"But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here."*

**Consecration** How could Americans be made to realize the importance of what had happened at Gettysburg during the great battle. Mr. Lincoln felt that the words of a prepared ritual would be useless. He was sure that anything said on the program would be overshadowed by the offering in life and service which had already been made.

The battleground was even then a holy place, regardless of the ceremonies which thoughtful citizens had arranged.

There is no finer expression of Lincoln's sincere humility, and his utter disregard for personal praise, than his casual mention of his immortal words, along with others spoken at the dedication. He considered his few remarks as fleeting and soon to be forgotten. They faded into insignificance when compared with the deeds accomplished there. Later in the speech he described his power to eulogize the dead as "poor" indeed.



THE WILLS HOUSE AT GETTYSBURG

Where President Lincoln spent the night preceding the Address and where he probably made minor changes in his copy. The Lincoln room is preserved as it was at the time of the Address.

*"It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—"*

**Dedication** Moving from the memorial part of his Address, Lincoln gave an inspirational urge in his appeal to the living. Not only was a field to be consecrated, but a people were to be dedicated to the work of preserving the life of the Union. Gettysburg was a most appropriate place to revive interest in saving the Union.

Mr. Lincoln did not brag about the glorious military victories won. He placed in the foreground the tremendous effort which still must be put forth. The living were to receive the torch of freedom from those who had brought it thus far. From Gettysburg they were to carry it on to the final success of the heroic effort.

*"That we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."*

**Resolutions** The dedication of the living to the unfinished task was emphasized by a series of resolutions which brought this carefully planned appeal to a conclusion. Among these phrases, so often quoted and universally known, we shall be certain to find the climax of the address.

But there has been much speculation as to which clause Lincoln gave preëminence—where he allowed the chief emphasis to fall. In this quest, we should be guided by the logical and natural development of the theme, rather than by words that have caught the popular fancy. The climax

should be reached in some expression of the general theme and it should have a spiritual tone.

Four important ideas or emphases are found in this final sentence.

The **Political Emphasis** is embodied in the words “government of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

The **Global Emphasis** comes with the words, “shall not perish from the earth.”

The **Casualty Emphasis** appears with the words “that these dead shall not have died in vain.”

The **Nativity Emphasis** is introduced with the words, “this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom.”

With which of these phrases does Mr. Lincoln reach the climax of the Gettysburg Address?

**The Political Emphasis** The phrase of the Address containing the three prepositions, “of,” “by,” and “for,” has become one of the best known shibboleths of our democracy. This phrase may be said to contain the “Political Emphasis” of the speech—the emphasis upon the processes of government. Those three prepositions have received the chief attention of many Americans, as public speakers—good, bad, and indifferent—have emphasized them out of all proportion to their importance.

We have yet to find any contemporary mention of the Address which would support our great emphasis of the prepositions. One of the shorthand reporters present at Gettysburg—a man who had often taken the President’s speeches—said in later years that Lincoln stressed the word “people” rather than the prepositions.

Where did Lincoln first see this series of prepositional phrases used? That question is less important than the discovery of where, at some other time, he himself used their essence. Previous to his Gettysburg appearance, Lincoln discussed in one of his messages to Congress the

same problem—that of the nation's ability to maintain itself during a great domestic struggle. He used these words:

*"This conflict presents the question whether a constitutional republic or democracy—a government of the people by the same people—can or cannot maintain its territorial integrity against its own domestic foes."*

Here Lincoln defines our political thought as calling for "a government of the people by the same people." The adjective "same" leaves no doubt where the emphasis was placed. It was on the word "people." In the message to Congress, there was no opportunity for extreme stress on the preposition "by" any more than on the preposition "of."

Carrying this idea into the Gettysburg Address, the same problem of the nation's survival is being considered. It is difficult to believe that Lincoln changed the emphasis from the "people" to the three prepositions. When he used the expression "government of the people," he was thinking of popular government. It is not likely that he gave any thought to the preposition "of" which he used.

We may be sure that the strong emphasis was placed on the word "people" where Lincoln usually placed the emphasis. It was in the will of the people that he found sovereignty vested. Lincoln's name is so often associated with the people that one writer recently said, "You couldn't quite tell where the people left off and where Abe Lincoln began."

**The Global Emphasis**      The last words of the Gettysburg Address express the international aspect of the American struggle. Mr. Lincoln asked his people to resolve that popular government "shall not perish from the earth." This clause provides the Global Emphasis.

Lincoln recognized the value of the Constitution but felt that there was something more important back of it. That something he describes as, "entwining itself more

closely about the human heart. That something is the principle of 'Liberty to All'—the principle that clears the path for all—gives hope to all."

From the time Lincoln was a small lad, he considered democracy "the great hope of all the people of the world." He thought that we would make our democracy so attractive and workable that peoples everywhere would want to embrace it. His plan to spread our republican form of government was through example, and he often remarked about America being "the envy of all the world." In the famous letter to Horace Greeley, he referred to "my oft-expressed personal wish that all men everywhere could be free." This was the supreme social aspiration of his life.

The political or the globular emphases, or both combined, noble as they are, do not seem to have those elements which we look for in the actual climax of the Address. Lincoln, in November, 1863, was not so much concerned with world problems as he was with local affairs. He was primarily interested in encouraging both the civilian and the armed forces to press on to the immediate goal before them.



WHERE LINCOLN SPOKE  
This monument, on the site of the great Address, was dedicated in 1869.

**The Casualty Emphasis** In the midst of a terrible war, Lincoln was especially moved by the tremendous sacrifice of human life. It was at Gettysburg where the most costly battle of the war had occurred. It is not strange that he looked forward to visiting the battlefield where so many had given the "last full measure of devotion."

The memory of those dead prompted the very first of the resolutions in which he invited everyone present to join him. He said, "We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain."

In this pledge, Lincoln used a figure of speech which may have been with him since his boyhood. In Weems' famous book, he had read about the Commander in Chief of the Revolutionary Army in after years visiting the graves of some fallen soldiers. Washington exclaimed, as he looked upon the hillocks which marked their resting places, "Perhaps some good angel has whispered that their fall was not in vain."

All who are familiar with the stirring events of America's first conquest of freedom know that patriots purchased with their blood a rich heritage for posterity. The Commander in Chief of the Union Armies in 1863, standing upon a battlefield with so many thousands of graves, could visualize the sacrifice already made. He wanted to make sure that these spent lives should not be wasted.

Americans are firmly convinced now that the soldiers who died at Gettysburg and on other battlefields of the War Between the States did not die in vain. But even Lincoln's stirring resolution is not the climax of the oration.

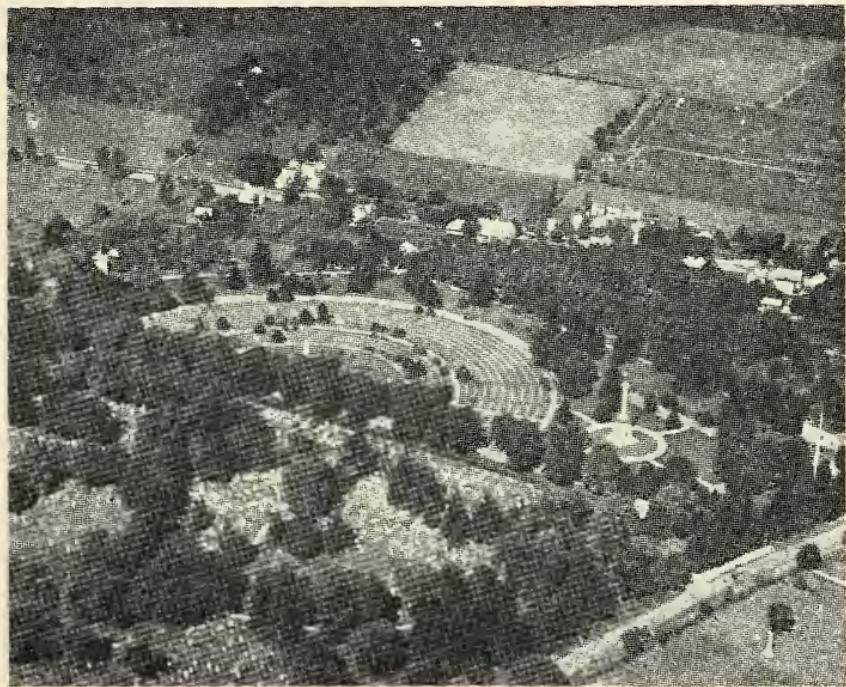
**The Nativity Emphasis** The political emphasis, the global emphasis, and the casualty emphasis were all significant in bringing this matchless piece of oratory to a close. We should expect, however, to find the supreme emphasis touching the nativity theme to which Lincoln constantly referred throughout the Address.

In approaching this major emphasis, he used a strong phrase probably suggested by the preceding speaker, Edward Everett. Everett had said that "under Providence" the soldiers had been animated for the grand triumph. Lincoln chose the words "under God" to set off, as in italics, the supreme effort of his oration.

He resolved that this nation, "conceived in liberty"; this nation that the fathers had "brought forth"; this nation "dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal"; "under God" shall have a "new birth of freedom."

This was the immeasurable emphasis which brought to a fitting close his great oration. With "a new birth of freedom" assured, soldiers would not have died in vain, the people's government would be preserved, and democracy would not perish from the earth.

This clause which gives preëminence to the emphasis on rebirth was not in either of Lincoln's preliminary copies of



The Gettysburg Cemetery Today

the speech. It was included in the stenographer's reports and in the three copies of the Address which Lincoln himself prepared later. When Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* called attention to the Address a week after the ceremonies, the "freedom resolution" was used as the predominating thought of the address.

Major General O. O. Howard was the speaker on July 4, 1865, when the cornerstone was laid for a monument at Gettysburg marking the place where Lincoln's Address had been delivered. At the close of his remarks, General Howard read Lincoln's oration. As if to summarize the theme, he added this comment: "The dead did not die in vain, and the nation has experienced already the new birth of freedom of which he spoke."

America did have "a new birth of freedom" in 1865. Possibly not all the plans for uniting the discordant elements of the country and restoring the shattered Southland were directed in justice, as "under God." This may have been because Lincoln did not live to chart the course of reconstruction, which sorely needed his patient guidance.



Gate to the Cemetery in 1863

Lincoln well knew that when democracy goes to war—even to maintain its own national integrity—it jeopardizes its established form of government. There is a possibility that it may never restore it. Lincoln also realized that the longer a state of war continues, the more deeply entrenched become the officers who enjoy dictatorial powers, and the more difficult is the task of returning political authority to the people.

Nations have to be reborn, rededicated, and rejuvenated if the fundamental principles by which they were conceived are to survive. Lincoln could not comprehend how America could guide other nations into a new era of freedom if she were unable to preserve it for herself.

This masterpiece of eloquence, recognized for its literary style, its forensic power, and its patriotic fervor, should find a permanent place in the archives of all peoples who embrace democracy. It sets forth in simple but forceful language the primary necessity for a republic emerging from war. It offers the most invigorating antidote for a war-sick country—**A NEW BIRTH OF FREEDOM.**

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## Comments on President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

### **Edward Everett to President Lincoln:**

"I should be glad if I could flatter myself that I came as near the central idea of the occasion in two hours as you did in two minutes."

### **Providence Journal, November 20, 1863:**

"We know not where to look for a more admirable speech than the brief one which the President made at the close of Mr. Everett's oration.... Could the most elaborate and studied oration be more beautiful, more touching, more inspiring, than those few words of the President? They had, in our humble judgment, the charm and power of the very highest eloquence."

### **George William Curtis in Harper's Weekly, December 5, 1863:**

"The few words of the President were from the heart to the heart. They cannot be read... without kindling emotion.... It was as simple and felicitous and earnest a word as was ever spoken."

### **H. J. Resolution 35, 79th Congress:**

"The Gettysburg Address of President Abraham Lincoln is the outstanding classic of the ages; it will touch the hearts of men and inspire them with faith in our matchless democracy as long as time endures."

### **Committee on the Judiciary Report, House and Senate, 79th Congress:**

"Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, dedicating every loyal American to the service of our country for all time to come, is recognized by world authorities as one of the greatest patriotic documents of the ages."

### **J. G. Randall, University of Illinois:**

"Lincoln's timeless words.... It is as significant to note what was omitted as what was included in a speech whose brevity made every syllable valuable. There was not a breath of hatred, not a hint of vindictiveness, not a trace of vengeful judgment.... He did not confine his thoughts to the dead. Rather he showed that it is only by constructive deeds of living men that the sacrifice of the dead can have value." (from *Lincoln, The President*, pp. 303-320)

### **William E. Barton:**

"The Gettysburg Address is so important in American history and literature we cannot afford not to know all that is to be known about it.... Abraham Lincoln said at Gettysburg, 'The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.' He was never more mistaken in all his life.... The Gettysburg Address will be printed and recited and translated and cast in durable bronze long after it shall have become necessary to append footnotes to explain that Gettysburg was neither a battle in the Revolutionary War nor a field somewhere amid the poppies of Flanders." (from *Lincoln at Gettysburg*. Foreword, pp. 124-125)

### **Stewart W. McClelland, President Lincoln Memorial University:**

"The Gettysburg Address is cherished by all freedom-loving peoples as one of the immortal papers expressing the principles of democracy defined in the Declaration of Independence and embodied in the Constitution of the United States." (from Foreword of *A Few Appropriate Remarks*)

### **F. Lauriston Bullard:**

"For all time, the simple and moving sentences with which he dedicated the cemetery at Gettysburg shall warm the hearts of men." (from *A Few Appropriate Remarks*, p. 1)

## Copies of the Gettysburg Address In Handwriting of President Lincoln

President Lincoln is known to have made five copies of the Gettysburg Address in his own handwriting.

The first and second copies are in the Library of Congress at Washington, gifts of the children of one of his secretaries, Honorable John Hay.

The first page of one of these copies is on stationery of the Executive Mansion, such as was used at the time. It is written in ink, but the last three words of the final line were marked out and different words in pencil written above them by the President. It seems probable that this page and the first draft of the second page were written in Washington and that the President destroyed the original second page, replacing it with the existing draft, written in pencil on the wide, blue-lined sheet of a type also much used by him.

The other copy was written in ink on the same type of white, blue-lined paper. Authorities hold conflicting views as to which of the two was the original, and concerning which copy he held as he spoke at Gettysburg.

A third copy was made for Honorable Edward Everett who placed it with the original copy of his own address at Gettysburg in the hands of a committee of ladies to be sold for the benefit of the Sanitary Commission at a fair held in New York for the benefit of soldiers of the war in March, 1864. This was purchased by an uncle of the late Senator Keyes of New Hampshire and remained in the Keyes family until comparatively recently. It is now in the Illinois State Library, purchased by many thousands of contributions by school children.

For a similar "Soldiers' and Sailors' Fair" in Baltimore, President Lincoln wrote a fourth copy at the request of George Bancroft, distinguished historian. It was unsuitable for the use intended, because it was written on both sides of the sheet, and Mr. Bancroft was permitted to keep it. Through Thomas F. Madigan, noted autograph dealer, the copy passed into a private collection in 1929.

The fifth and final copy (reproduction of which is made on our center pages of this pamphlet) was prepared for the same Fair and reproduced in a famous volume, called "Autograph Leaves of Our Country's Authors." It passed into the family of Dr. William J. A. Bliss of Baltimore, whose grandmother married Mr. Bancroft, and the copy is still in the hands of the Bliss family.

## Judgment of Mr. Everett and President Lincoln's Reply

(Letters exchanged November 20, 1863)

### Mr. Everett to President Lincoln:

"Not wishing to intrude upon your privacy, when you must be much engaged, I beg in this way to thank you very sincerely for your great thoughtfulness for my daughter's accommodation on the platform yesterday, and much kindness otherwise to me and mine at Gettysburg. Permit me also to express my great admiration of the thoughts expressed by you, with such eloquent simplicity and appropriateness, at the consecration of the Cemetery. I should be glad if I could flatter myself that I came as near the central idea of the occasion in two hours as you did in two minutes. My son, who parted from me at Baltimore, and my daughter, concur in this sentiment."

### President Lincoln to Mr. Everett:

"Your kind note of to-day is received. In our respective parts yesterday you could not have been excused to make a short address, nor I a long one. I am pleased to know that, in your judgment, the little I did say was not entirely a failure. Of course, I knew Mr. Everett would not fail; and yet, while the whole discourse was eminently satisfactory, and will be of great value, there were passages in it which transcended my expectations. The point made against the theory of the General Government being only an agency, whose principals are the States, was new to me, and, as I think, is one of the best arguments for the National supremacy. The tribute to our noble women for their angel-ministering to the suffering soldiers surpasses in its way, as do the subjects of it, whatever has gone before."

## The Battle of Gettysburg

The Battle of Gettysburg was fought on the first three days of July, 1863. It is considered by most authorities to be the decisive contest in the War Between the States. General Robert E. Lee was making his second invasion of Northern territory. If he won, wavering European nations might recognize the Confederacy. They might even give military aid.

The chance collision of advance forces brought the two armies together at the quiet town now so famous. Neither commander planned to fight there, nine miles above the Maryland-Pennsylvania line. General Lee wanted to fight at Cashtown, nine miles west. General Meade tentatively chose Pipe Creek Heights, fifteen miles south in Maryland.

But geography set a natural stage for a decisive contest. Four basic highways, or pikes, led straight outward from the square at the center of the town. Others diverged a short distance from the town. There are highways in all principal directions. The peculiar topography south of the town has made Seminary Ridge and Cemetery Hill immortal names in American history.

The three days' battle—each day with its distinct characteristics—was filled with unstinted valor on both sides. "It is this valor of both sides, rather than the unifying spectacle of Americans killing Americans with furious intensity of purpose, that constitutes the chief tradition of Gettysburg," says Professor Randall of the University of Illinois.

Fully 93,000 men were engaged on the Northern side, 80,000 on the Southern. Not often in warfare has so large a percentage of the men engaged been killed or wounded. One estimate fixes Northern casualties at 212 per 1,000 men engaged, the Southern casualties at 301 to each 1,000. In the First Minnesota Regiment, 82 per cent of the men engaged were killed or wounded. Perhaps Pickett's famous charge on the third afternoon stands in history as the most dramatic event of the three days. But the contests at the Round Tops, Culp's Hill, the Peach Orchard, and the Wheat Field were names known in every home in the land when the battle was over.

On July first, a Southern brigade seeking shoes and other army necessities came upon "a large force of cavalry supported by infantry" at Gettysburg. Reports convinced each commander that a battle here was inevitable. General Lee realized he could not go on unless he could remove the Northern forces from his way. His troops drove back those of the North, but as the day ended a Union line of defense was formed on Cemetery Hill. The Northern forces needed time. Night gave it to them.

Action on the second day did not come until mid-afternoon. Then General Sickles forsook the Northern key position at Little Round Top and moved his men forward into more level country, known ever after as the Peach Orchard and the Wheat Field. No more fierce fighting, no greater shambles, took place in the war than in the fighting here. By chance, the Northern General Warren happened to glimpse the Southern advance on Little Round Top and saved this position just in time. Otherwise, the Northern position might have been made untenable. General Lee's plan of attack did not work out as he had timed it.

Dawn of July 3 saw fighting begin around Culp's Hill. For seven hours there were charges and countercharges with fearful slaughter. Then, at one o'clock, there began the greatest cannonade ever seen on American soil. It lasted two hours. When this was over, Pickett's gallant men charged at Cemetery Hill. Only a few reached the center of the Northern lines. They were not enough; the charge was shattered and the battle was over.

Nothing was left for General Lee but retreat. His dream of Northern conquest was over for all time. President Lincoln always felt that had General Meade moved more promptly after the battle to prevent Lee reaching Virginia, the war would have been over much sooner.

Today, over two thousand memorials in stone, steel, and bronze, valued at more than four millions of dollars, dot the thirty-eight square miles of the historic battlefield. As other battlefields of the great war recede in men's memory, Gettysburg becomes more and more significant in the minds of men, largely because of what President Lincoln "said there" November 19, 1863.



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